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Revisiting the Classics: Janet Chan and the Legacy of 'Changing Police Culture'

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To refer to a text published in 1997 as a 'classic' may seem premature. At the time of writing this is less than 20 years ago, and, as we have seen in the earlier essays in this series (e.g. Reiner 2015), there are clear 'classics' which have withstood the test of a much longer time frame. However, I would argue in the case of Janet Chan's*Changing Police Culture: Policing in a Multicultural Society*the label of 'classic' is richly deserved. Thebook has enjoyed a significant influence on police culture scholars since its publication, and will continue to do so. As its *Google Scholar* citation record would suggest (566 citations at the end of 2014), Chan's most popular work also continues to be a substantial source of inspiration and conceptual development for established and new policing researchers (see for example, Loftus 2009). It was reviewed by Nigel Fielding, Simon Holdaway, Peter K. Manning, AoganMulcahy, Gerry McGrath, Steve Kay, John Lea and David Wall (among others) between 1997 and 1999, and Chan's 1996 *British Journal of Criminology* article, based on the main theoretical argument of the book, features in Newburn's*Policing Key Readings* (2005).

Background

The path that led to the development of *Changing Police Culture* is not a linear one, as is mirrored in the theoretical conceptualisationof the text itself. Chan began her academic career at the University of Toronto as a data analyst, with a background in applied mathematics and computer science, taking a position in the Centre of Criminology as a 'generic' statistician. It was here that she first worked with Clifford Shearing, Phillip Stenning and Richard Ericson on various projects, some related to policing, gaining a Master's degree in Criminology in 1980. Chan later moved to Australia and completed a PhD at Sydney University on penal reform. It was 1990 before Chan was able to study policing again, this time through a Sir Maurice Byers Fellowship offered by the New South Wales (NSW) Police Service for her proposed study of 'Policing in a Multicultural Society'. It was this fellowship that eventually led to the *Changing Police Culture*monograph.

The broader context for this fellowship and the book which followed involves events specific to Australia and to NSW Police in particular, but with significance for policing in many nations. Australian police forces had been under growing scrutiny concerning their relations with Aboriginal peoples since the late 1960s. There had been a few inquiries into cases of police violence and racism against the Aboriginal population in the 1980s and 1990s, however it was a television documentary in 1992 which raised the profile of the issue in the national consciousness. Filmed over six weeks in a deprived inner-city area of Sydney, *Cop It Sweet* displayed the endemic racism exhibited by police officers in the area, behaviour which seemed to be 'business as usual' for those involved.

What was perhaps more concerning fortheNSW Police was not so much the overt racism on displayin the documentary,but the fact that the ongoing police reforms initiated by the then Police Commissioner, John Avery, had seemingly had no effect on these officers. Avery had initiated

sweeping and dramatic changes to rid the force of corruption and racism and to build an ethos of professionalism. The command structure had been redesigned and the overall operational focus of the force was now based on a community policing model. Eight years of work in reforming NSW Police seemed to have been in vain and critics were now calling for more drastic measures. Chan's focus of the Byers Fellowship, which began prior to the release of *Cop It Sweet*, was to study the NSW Police's formal policy for working with minority communities. The subsequent monograph develops this into an analysis of the purpose of the reform project itself, how it was implemented and the eventual outcomes. *Changing Police Culture* thus examines why years of police reform seemed to have no impact on police racism in New South Wales.

Evaluating police culture and change

While the main focus of Chan's text stems from events in New South Wales and uses data gathered from NSW police officers, the issues raised for policing minority populations and for the wider police culture literature have resonance beyond Australia. After an exploration of police racism and views of minorities about the police (primarily in Australia, but with reference to texts from other countries), Chan examines existing literature on the causes of inherent discrimination in police work, police culture and existing strategies for changing relationships between the police and minorities, such as through rule-tightening or changing police recruitment practices. All of these sections draw upon work both within and outside of Australia and demonstrate how the issues of racism in policing are of relevance across many nations. Having said this, one might be forgiven for assuming that the subsequent theory-building and research findings presented in the book would support the dominant existing view of a common police culture across forces and even across some countries. This was not to be the case, and is the basis from which the significance of the book for police culture scholars stems.

Chan undertakes an insightful re-examination of police culture literature and theory, arguing that the existing conceptualisations of police culture were so limited and under-theorisedthat they inhibit useful discussions of how toreform the police. Chan proposed four main criticisms of the police culture literature: 1) that it does not account for differentiations in culture between or within police forces; 2) that little account is given of police officer agency in relation to how the occupational culture is adopted; 3) that little account is given of the role played by the wider context in which police officers operate in crafting their occupational culture; and 4) that the above elements leave little room for cultural change.

To address these shortcomings, Chan develops an interactive model of the production of police practice. To construct it, she draws on the work of a number of theorists, primarily Schein (1985), Sackmann (1991) and Bourdieu (as described in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Each adds a component to Chan's conceptualisation. Schein and Sackmann are used to gain a better understanding of police culture itself, one which is more dynamic than much of the previous

literature had envisioned. Within their combined framework, culture is composed of different types of knowledge: dictionary, directory, recipe and axiomatic knowledge.The exact composition of this culture will vary throughout the different levels of the organisation, and eachtype of knowledge serves a different purpose. These types of knowledge are not static and change depending on experiences or through repeated applications. Bourdieu's theories of 'field' and 'habitus' are used to contrast the traditional formal and rule-bounded nature of police culture often put forward by researchers and police officers themselves. Instead, the focus is shifted to a relational view as the field and habitus only fully work in interaction with each other. The field is constituted by objective historical and social elements, such as legal powers for the police, the legacy of relationships between the police and minority communities or the socio-economic standing of each group. Habitus is where the cultural knowledge of the police will lie. It is comprised of 'dispositions' which enable individuals to cope with unforeseen circumstances by integrating past experiences. When an individual encounters a particular field, a strategic response is triggered by the habitus. There are an infinite number of possible responses to a field, allowing for creativity and innovation in individuals. Thus, police practice is not dictated by a rule-bounded informal culture. For Chan, this traditional construction of 'police culture' is merely a codification of a much more dynamic and fluid process.

Chan's final element of her interactional model of police practice uses the work of Shearing and Ericson (1991) (two of her mentors from the University of Toronto), to provide the mechanism for how the cultural knowledge 'tool kit' is passed to new officers. For Shearing, Ericson and Chan, this is not a process of socialisation whereby new recruits are passive recipients of a structured 'cop code', but rather, stories are used as a way of transmitting schemas and scripts to new officers which they will employ as they see fit. This provides officers with guidance on actions and practice, a vocabulary for justifying their choices, but still allows for individual interpretation and initiative. In so doing, Chan has placed police 'actors' at the centre of her model – they are active interpreters of their world, using their habitus (cultural knowledge) to interpret and react to their structural conditions (the field) to produce and to modify their practice. This is in contrast to the usual linear model of how police practice is created: thatstructural conditions determine cultural knowledge which in turn dictates police practice.This omits the police actor from the process. Chan's framework allows for variation across and between police forces in terms of how the field is experienced, interpreted and acted upon, taking into account the role played by the wider political and social world in police work. Chan's model therefore opens up the possibility of change in police culture by highlighting the various factors and elements involved in constructing it as well as a more realistic view of how variable it can be across an organisation. It shifts the focus towards what might contribute to the creation of problematic types of cultural knowledge in the habitus, such as police racism,and to the role played by the wider policing field. Only by understanding the contribution of each can an organisation start to consider how to change the resulting practice in their staff.

Ultimately, Chan argues that change is possible in the police, but it is difficult. Isolated initiatives such as diversity training will be ineffective as they only address a small element of the police practice model, in this case, axiomatic knowledge, with little impact on the other elements of cultural knowledge or with supportive change in the field. Likewise, changes in the field such as new

legislation must be met by significant changes in the habitus, including all four elements of cultural knowledge. A combination of strong and consistent leadership, political commitment and external pressure is needed to overcome the often powerful internal resistance to change.

Wider impact

While Chan's interpretation of the existing police culture literature is itself a broad generalisation (and she acknowledges in the text that not all writers up to this point view police culture as a uniform, unchanging and all-encompassing system into which all police officers are socialised), her use of a complex theoretically-informed framework is a welcome departure from the general tone of much which went before. While the sometimes descriptive ethnographic accounts of earlier writers may not have attempted to capture the development of police practice as Chan did, their work has provided us with detailed and insightful accounts of what the world of policing is like for those within it, although at this point in time primarily in the US, the UK, Canada and Australia. The value of Chan's work on police culture and practice is that it builds on this foundation and incorporates it into a theoretical framework while taking the discussion further. Ironically, it is a text based on interviews and questionnaires, rather than ethnography, which places the police actor in the centre of an interactive model, rather than omitting the police actor from a linear model, to highlight the relational nature of police practice.

Chan's work on police culture had a noticeable impact on the governing bodies of policing in Australia. Her work was cited by the New South Wales Ombudsman extensively, was used in the report of the Wood Royal Commission into New South Wales Police and was used by the Police Integrity commission (*from personal communication with Janet Chan,* 03/06/2015). Dixon (1999) has noted that the Wood Royal Commission's view of police culture as an overly simplistic explanation for police corruption was heavily influenced by Chan. For police researchers in Australia, the book initially received modest attention after publication with Lea (1999) and McGrath (1999) acknowledging its merits, but McGrath questioning the completeness of Chan's analysis from the viewpoint of an operational police officer. He felt that the reforms she examined were only ever meant to be a publicity exercise and were at no point taken seriously from middle managers downwards. While it is of course important to be reflexive on the outsider's view of policing when theorising about police culture, the fact that the reforms might have been seen asbeing for external consumption only reflects an important aspect of the cultural knowledge 'tool kit' officers were receiving. This is a key componentof Chan's analysis.Despite these reservations from an operational point of view~~Since this time~~, Chan's work has continued to grow in popularity in Australian research, with Chan now occupying the position of the 30th most cited scholar in the *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Criminology.*

However, it is in the United Kingdom where her work has received the most attention. This may be partly due to the fortuitous timing of *Changing Police Culture*: the 1990s were a watershed period

for both police culture research and for the political landscape of policing in the UK. The arrival of the New Labour government in 1997 brought with it a commitment to examine the failed Metropolitan Police investigation into the 1993 murder of a young black teenager, Stephen Lawrence. Sir William Macpherson led the inquiry, which reported in 1999. In sharp contrast to the last significant inquiry into police actions in London with the black community, the 1981 Scarman report, Macpherson not only accepted that institutional racism exists, but also identified it as the underlying cause of the failed investigation. What was more, the commissioner of the Metropolitan Police at the time, Sir Paul Condon, publicly admitted that his force was institutionally racist. Other police forces in England and Wales soon followed suit, the first of these being Greater Manchester Police, and across the country measures were implemented in police organisations to try to address discriminatory policy and practice (Holdaway and O'Neill 2004, O'Neill and Holdaway 2007). While the effect of the Lawrence Report was seismic within policing, there was a similar dramatic effect on policing research to follow in its wake (see for example, the 'Rapid Response' from *Sociological Research Online* at: http://www.socresonline.org.uk/4/1/lawrence.html). The fallout from this period in policing continues to be examined and debated (see for example, Foster et al. 2005 and Souhami 2014).

Changing Police Culture thus arrived at exactly the right moment in the UK to help inform debates as to what was to be done about police relations with minority ethnic communities and what role police culture played in this. The book was reviewed several times by UK policing scholars. David Wall (1999) is largely positive about the text, but finds it silent on how Chan's theoretical framework for the development of police practice applies to agents in the private sector, which by this time were already a significant presence in security provision in many countries. Wall also wonders if it applies in the same way to other aspects of diversity in policing, such as gender.Mulcahy (1998: 527) finds Chan's text to be 'one of the best examples yet of a detailed and theoretically grounded analysis of the dynamics and pitfalls of the police reform process'. He has a few critiques in that Chan prioritises structural constraints in the failure of reform over the role of the police actors themselves, despite placing them as central to her police practice model. He also feels that she could have further developed the impact of public opinion on police reform efforts, considering that wider social and cultural context is a key part of her framework. Fielding (1997) questions Chan's claims to a novel approach in conceptual theorising. However, he does note that her theoretical framework is 'welcome for attempting to bring theorization of policing into touch with contemporary theory'. These critiques offer some interesting points of thought in terms of how widely Chan's theoretical framework can be applied and whether more consideration is needed of other factors in the policing landscape, like public opinion, as well asgreater primacy for officers' own views and actions. Chan has acknowledged that the text was perhaps not as well developed as it could have been and that her next book,*A Fair Cop*(Chan et al 2003), presents a more matured study of police culture (*from personal communication with Janet Chan,* 03/06/2015). However, any theoretical framework will be shaped by the context in which it developed and it is incumbentupon the scholars who follow to test it in other policing fields.

Changing Police Culture~~The book~~ was also examined in the USA by Manning (1998), who found the theoretical analysis 'sophisticated' and 'masterly' - although it left him dispirited about the possible success of any police reform attempt. Indeed, while Chan discusses in detail how and why the Avery reform efforts failed in NSW Police using her interactive model, there is no clear answer in terms of how to change police culture in general. This is perhaps to be expected from Chan's framework as local events and dispositions will influence the path of any reform project. Monique Marks has often used Chan's work to analyse the change process of policing in South Africa (see for example Marks 2005). More recently, Loftus (2009) noted how much the British policing landscape has altered since the Lawrence Report (1999). Loftus refers to *Changing Police Culture* in this discussion to illustrate how dramatic shifts in the field of policing have contributed to a change in the habitus of many officers in relation to issues such as racism, sexism, homophobia, an appreciation for the role of the public in police work and the growing acceptance (and presence) of university-educated police officers. As Loftus (2009) goes on to illustrate however, these changes in cultural knowledge are not wholesale and some elements of the population continue to experience the hard edge of policing,most notably the white working class. This is an important development of Chan's work in that Loftus examines other aspects of police culture, as Wall (1999) requested, and points out a variation in the extent to which police cultural knowledgehas changed in relation to certain minority groups.In Cockcroft's (2013) assessment of the current state of police culture literature, *Changing Police Culture* is cited as an essential text in this cannon, identifying~~citing~~ it as part of the 'late period' of police culture work. Along with Waddington's (1999) analysis, these two texts are judged to have contributed to a fundamental reframing of how police culture is conceptualised.

Chan's book – and the *British Journal of Criminology* article which preceded it in which the theoretical framework was first presented– has become a staple and critical~~seminal~~ text in the police culture literature. While often simplified through a narrow focus on the *field* and *habitus* element of Chan's analysis, any discussion of the development of police culture research would seem incomplete were it not to be mentioned. Previous writers in this series have grappled with the question as to whether dutiful referencing in contemporary texts signifies only a tokenistic gesture to these 'classics'or indeed a true appreciation of the book (see for example O'Malley 2015). Ultimately, this is a question that cannot be answered. However, to reach the enviable position of being the object 'ritualistic footnoting' (Reiner 2015: 308) is in itself an achievement. After its publication, Chan extended and developed the conceptual framework of *Changing Police Culture* through a two-year study of police recruits in Australia. *A Fair Cop* examines the initial training and socialisation experiences of new police officers during a period of change (Chan et al. 2003). Chan's career then took a shift in focus as she completed not only a Master of Art degree but also a Master of Fine Arts degree. This then led to a study of artists and how they learn their craft, in same the way that Chan had studied police officers, using Bourdieu's theories to assess a different field of practice. Throughout this time, Chan continued to supervise PhD students researching police work and more recently Chan has returned to policing research in an analysis of 'big data' and the police use of technology.

For me, *Changing Police Culture* was a changing of the guard. As scholars, we weremoving away from the largely male, descriptive and observational-based studies into a new world in which police culture could be researched and analysed in different ways and with different outcomes. This is not to say that these earlier elements are problematic – indeed, as mentioned above the ~~classic writers~~early writers of police culture continue to contribute to our understanding of the lived experiences of policing and ethnography itself is vital to understanding how policing changes and develops (as we have seen in Loftus' (2009) text). The significance of Chan's contribution was not just in bringing a new and intricate theory into the analysis of police practice, but to open the door to a diversification of how we think about and study policing.

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